



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

National Wildlife Refuge System

Wilderness Facts

Wild Things

■ Forest Service employee Robert Marshall, who wrote “Magna Carta of Wilderness” in 1930, compared wilderness to the Mona Lisa, saying “If you cut it up in little pieces one inch square and distribute them among the art galleries of the world so millions might see it where hundreds see it now, neither the millions nor the hundreds would get any genuine value.”

■ In 1964 The Wilderness Act established the National Wilderness Preservation System and a process for Federal land managing agencies to establish wilderness areas.

■ Today the System includes over 100 million acres. The Fish and Wildlife Service manages 20.7 million acres under the National Wildlife Refuge System. The National Park Service manages 42.3 million acres, the Forest Service 34.6 million acres, and the Bureau of Land Management 5.2 million acres.

■ In 30 years, Congress has designated 75 wilderness areas on 65 units of the National Wildlife Refuge System in 25 states. Over 90 percent—or 18.6 million acres—of Refuge System wilderness is in Alaska. The remaining 2.5 million acres are in the lower 48 states.

■ Great Swamp NWR (NJ) was the first refuge to receive wilderness designation—3,660 acres in 1968.

■ The smallest wilderness area in the National Wildlife Refuge System is two-acre Wisconsin Islands Wilderness, Green Bay NWR (WI).

■ The largest wilderness area in the Refuge System is 8 million acres of the Arctic NWR. Nearly 75 per cent of Alaska Maritime NWR is wilderness. These 11 island wilderness units comprise 2.5 million of the refuge’s 3.5 million acres.

■ The 1994 California Desert Bill expanded wilderness areas on two refuges: Havasu NWR (CA/AZ) by 3,195 acres and Imperial NWR (CA/AZ) by 5,836 acres.

The Wilderness Act

■ The Act defines wilderness as areas that: 1) are affected primarily by nature, where man is a visitor; 2) possess opportunities for solitude; 3) are Federally-owned, undeveloped and generally over 5,000 acres; 4) are managed to allow natural processes to operate; 5) may contain scientific, educational, scenic or historical features; and 6) are formally designated by Congress.

■ Objectives of wilderness designation include: 1) perpetuating natural ecosystems; 2) providing opportunities for primitive public recreation; 3) allowing natural progression for indigenous plants and animals; 4) protecting threatened and endangered species; and 5) maintaining the primitive character of wilderness.

■ Wilderness areas are managed to provide wilderness education; preclude permanent structures; protect the resource; prevent destruction by motorized vehicles; exclude timber harvests.

■ The following activities may be allowed on wilderness: 1) hunting, fishing and trapping; 2) limited backpacking and camping; 3) fire, insect and disease control; 4) access to private and state lands; 5) research; 6) mineral development; 7) livestock grazing.

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
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